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2011

Youth as a Form of Conflict

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International Network for Economics and Conflict

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United States Institute of Peace**International Network for Economics and Conflict****Youth as a Form of Conflict**

July 27, 2011 | 12:57pm

This essay is one of six included in the August 3-4, 2011 eSeminar, *Revisiting Strategies for Post-Conflict Economic Recovery: Assessing the Findings of the 2011 World Development Report

*A Paradigm for Change: The Youth Revolt*by Jomana Amara

The very fact that the World Bank titled the World Bank Development Report (WDR) for 2011 “Conflict, Security and Development” indicates the importance that development agencies attach to addressing the detrimental effect conflict has on curtailing development and the crucial importance of security in promoting reconstruction. In the preamble, Robert Zoellick, the president of the World Bank stresses the imperative to “bring[ing] security and development together to put down roots deep enough to break the cycles of fragility and conflict.” The introduction to the report correctly points out that the nature of conflict has changed from an overwhelming number of conventional and civil wars to a vicious cycle of low level repeated violence that is difficult to classify. The violence has characteristics of criminal and political activities quite often reinforcing each other. It is a state of “neither peace nor war” but long, brutal and devastating conflict that tears the very fabric of society.

However, overlooked in the conflict-development nexus described by the report and missing from the background papers is a systematic and targeted discussion of the newest conflict erupting – the “youth upheaval” or “youth revolt” and the potential for such conflicts erupting in vulnerable countries in all continents over the world where the direct impact of violence most affects the youth. The WDR does identify organized crime and trafficking as an important part of current violent threats in nations such as Sierra Leone, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Columbia located in disparate parts of the globe. However, the report does not directly mention that these nations also have a large youth bulge, keeping in mind that youth are most likely the participants and recipients of this gang and organized crime violence. The WDR does categorize youth unemployment and the youth bulge as internal economic stresses that could push a nation into conflict. At the same time, the WDR does not identify that the youth issue has morphed from a stress to a form of conflict.

The direct effects of the youth war are evident in the Arab spring, an uprising that was sparked by two young men: Mohammad Bouazizi of Tunisia who inspired the Tunisian revolution after he set himself on fire to protest against unemployment and the state’s role, and Khalid Saed of Egypt who was killed by security forces while in custody in Alexandria, Egypt. The two were youth who refused to acquiesce to the state and demanded that their rights be respected. In doing so, they tapped into a common sentiment among millions of Arab youth of material deprivation, sense of helplessness, lack of potential and political alienation. Their deaths motivated an apathetic youthful generation to rebel and turned a system upside down where the youth led the political discourse and the older generation followed. This youth upheaval is the result of an ‘action oriented quick results generation’ impatient of waiting for change and taking matters into hand. What started in Tunis and Egypt has now engulfed

most Arab nations and threatens the rest of the regional nations.

It is highly likely that the youth revolt will spread beyond the Arab world. Youth bulges are evident in nations that are currently identified as having high levels of violence. Young people in these nations constitute a significant percentage of the population ranging from a low of 29 percent of the population in Georgia and a high of 48 percent in the Maldives, with most nations youth population hovering around 30 percent and growing. The conditions that nurtured the Arab spring are festering and evident in violence prone nations. The generational war can be attributed to a number of factors that ration away resources from the youth to the established. Young people face severe economic and social exclusion due to substandard education, high unemployment, and lack of quality employment, horizontal inequalities, lack of access to housing and credit, and poverty - with criminal networks preying on and recruiting youth. Thus, the inclusion of youth is the most critical development challenge facing the world today. This presents nations with an opportunity to build a lasting foundation for prosperity by harnessing the full potential of its young population.

A compelling and credible agenda for change between international actors, national governments, and civil society, that includes youth, can be created to facilitate change. The youth revolt should be viewed in a positive light and its effects directed productively. For reforms to have results, there needs to be a clear understanding of the necessary changes. Youth are an impatient generation responding to the many decades of waiting by their seniors. They are action oriented and technology natives. As a result, the pace and priority of reform will necessarily be different. Their energy and enthusiasm must be encouraged and channeled. Economic reform must be inclusive and equitable directed to the needs of the young. The rentier systems that encourage patronage and provide privileges to the political elite must be addressed. Educational systems will need to be overhauled with a rethinking of what constitutes a qualified graduate.

The youth revolts sweeping the Arab world will set the tone and serve as an example for other youth movements potentially with far reaching consequences. In the Arab world, establishment institutions such as national regimes and NGOs and civil society are being forced to reevaluate their positions and actions on issues as diverse as economic reform, the role of young people in politics, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is unlikely that the generational war will stop at the borders of the Arab world. It is likely to be a movement that inspires similar movements across the globe. To mitigate the possibility of youth revolts spreading, attention must be paid to the differential needs, circumstances, and experiences of the youth to create an environment conducive to economic development and a more hopeful future for this youth generation and future youth generations in the world.

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- *Importance of Benefit-Cost Analysis*
- *Role of Markets in Promoting Peace*
- *Prioritizing Innovative Governance Partnerships*
- *Innovation and Control Mechanisms in Conflict-Affected States*

- *Optimal Mix of Development Assistance*

Tags: WDR eSeminar

Comment #1

Welcome to this session. I will use my prerogative as moderator to ask Jomana Amara the first question. You identify youth unemployment as an important oversight. Given what we know about the political economy of conflict-affected states (particularly the state-centric inclination and vested interests), how would you have liked the 2011 WDR to address this issue?

August 3, 2011

8:50am

Posted by: rgilpin

Comment #4

I would like to see the 2011 WDR explicitly address the youth issue. In a sense, either devote a section to youth or within each section breakout the discussion on youth. I believe there is enough that is very specific and pertinent to youth issues that it merits a section on its own.

For example, we understand that patterns of unemployment differ across different segments of society and different geographical locations even within the same nation. We address issues of employment relevant to women. However, I have not seen a discussion of unemployment that focuses on youth and their issues.

August 3, 2011

12:05pm

Posted by: jhamara

Comment #2

Thanks for highlighting the importance of youth in securing sustainable peace in conflict affected areas. Here at Search for Common Ground we have been working with youth for over 20 years to engage them in conflict transformation. We have four key pillars that we base our work on:

- Self-Transformation: Help youth manage the way conflict affects their life by creating space for them to contemplate or understand conflict. This helps facilitate a personal transformation and the internalization of the

principles of conflict transformation. SFCG strategies take many forms from pre-kindergarten education, through dialogue and radio work. They combine approaches that focus on giving youth those tools and skills, and informing them about what affects them, supporting them to develop strategies to address those issues, and creating experiences to help their personal transformation.

- Voice: Often youth want to reach across the divide but they do not have access. SFCG's work focuses on enabling youth to find their voice and creates platforms for young people's voices to be heard, so that they may contribute to the debates that are taking place in their society. In order for the youth voice to be effective, parallel strategies need to be used with adults to help them see the value in the creativity and energy that youth bring to the dialogue, and also help both groups build on the experience of adults.

-

- Cooperative Action: SFCG moves participants beyond dialogue to action, e.g. youth taking on concrete activities across the divide, addressing root causes of the conflict with concrete actions such as leadership training. This cooperative action must engage not only youth but also elders in a multi-generational dialogue, e.g. a Bike Riders Association project in Sierra Leone where youth veterans who created a taxi association but were harassed by police, built up their leadership capacity and facilitated a dialogue with the authorities after training from SFCG.

- Policy: Addressing the ways children and youth are dealt with by influencing policy at the local, national and international level, with the aim to create safe space for young people to inform policies that concern them and to facilitate the rights of young people as stated in the United Nations Convention of the Right of the Children. One example of this is the Child Soldiers Initiative, a Search for Common Ground programme that has the aim of eradicating the use of children as soldiers through facilitating a dialogue between the military and other stakeholders. Another example is the Washington Network on Children in Armed Conflict (WNCAC) forum, which facilitates a dialogue between practitioners and policy-makers around issues of Children and Youth affected by conflict.

The five key principles that underpin our work are:

- Work with influential youth leaders (multiplier youth) – Young people organize themselves naturally and have leaders who influence their attitudes and behaviors. SFCG seeks to work with those youth who play leadership roles among their peers, whose transformation leads to the transformation of many others.

- Create five-degree shifts – When working with youth who are involved in violence or negative activities, it is helpful to think, not of “turning them around”, but of helping them to direct their energies and resources into positive activities. Help potential electoral thugs to be election monitors, for example.
- Work directly with youth organizations – In zones of conflict, young people have created formal and informal groups to address their own developmental needs. It is important to work with those structures to empower them and to help them develop the skills needed to deliver effective programs.
- Replace the power of the gun – The gun is extraordinarily powerful in changing the roles of young people. It creates a sense of meaning and immediacy for them and flips the power dynamic between youth and elders on its head. Programming should identify the needs and motivations of youth and build on them.
- Foster adult-youth partnerships – The most effective youth participation in promoting peace or protecting children’s rights is done in partnership with adults. This can mean building alliances between youth-led and adult-led civil society organizations, for example.

Over the years we have undertaken projects that include:

- Educational projects – Formal and non-formal activities geared toward providing information in entertaining ways that allow children to understand their rights, analyse differences, and positively transform their attitudes towards building cooperative relationships.
- Voice projects – Media activities that create platforms for children and youth to participate in the local and national dialogues on issues that affect them.
- Action projects – activities that allow children and youth to come together across dividing lines to take concrete actions in changing the communities in which they live.

My question is, what do you think of these principles and what is missing in the approaches that are being taken currently to engage youth in this area fo work?

We have summarised our work in an Introductory Toolkit for Engaging C&Y in Conflict Transformation whcih can be accessed here http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/children/programmes_children.html

Nick Oatley, Director of Institutional Learning, SFCG

August 3, 2011

9:21am

Posted by: [noatley](#)

Comment #5

I think that your principles are commendable. Perhaps an additional principle that is derived from what you have is helping youth move into the mainstream where they would exert greater influence and ability to sway policy.

Perhaps this point is addressed in your action projects where you encourage youth to take concrete action to change the communities in which they live.

Where you able to track the influence of youth leaders? Do they become mainstream leaders as youth? How well do they translate the work in the youth groups to influence societal outcomes?

August 3, 2011

5:45pm

Posted by: [jhamara](#)

Comment #3

The principles are great. I think though for the last one "foster adult-youth partnerships" in addition to building alliances between youth-led and adult-led organizations, it might be helpful to build personal relationships

between the two groups. One of the ways could be partnering an adult with child to have mentor mentee relationships. However, the mentor should be carefully selected since he/she can make profound influence on a growing child's perspective. (analogical to Big Brother Big Sister in the U.S.)

August 3, 2011

10:08am

Posted by: aigul

Comment #6

Thank you for this essay - I am an anthropologist, concentrating on economic initiatives in development, and thus far, I have concentrated my work on the Palestinian Territories. Of course, in Palestine, the youth question is very important, and I noticed earlier you referred to many of the youth in the Arab movements as appearing "apathetic" before now. I wanted just to throw a few questions / comments out to add, if that is alright? 1.) In many areas of the Middle East (and others, as well, but my focus is there), participation of the youth is largely constrained by the pressure from older generations - in particular, I have felt a tension between those (older) who have either "done it before" or who don't want youth to "rock the [tenuous] boat" - thus, I see many young people not "apathetic" in the classic sense, but maybe overwhelmed in their context - wanting to do something, being the victims of so much direct and structural violence, but hitting glass walls of the community. I wonder, therefore, how the characterization of their generation as apathetic or unconnected has even stunted their actions, or at least constrained them. I actually ask this as a member (and here I date myself) of the "incredibly apathetic" American Gen X group. Of course, we were (and are) not apathetic, but I would argue each generation contextualizes themselves into conflicts differently, and so we, as researchers and policy-makers must continually teach ourselves to re-learn our listening skills. For example, the youth in Palestine represent 3rd-4th-5th generation descendants, many of them knowing the Nakba from stories, rather than from direct victims (whose generation is now quite small) I wonder how this affects the youth in contextualizing themselves in any conflict. 2.) [and this grows a bit from the first] What motivates the youth to identify themselves with parties in conflict? For example, once again, with the Nakba, we have generations now who are not only geographically, but genealogically separated from a critical historical event. In Egypt, the youth generation grew up in a world that never knew anything but Mubarak. So, how does this generation build its identity, and how does this identity relate itself to those that came before (and that will come after) it? For me (and this is my bias as an anthropologist), I see so much need to learn to recognize the voices of different groups, but so much pressure to make standards of reading and assessing, which may end up masking real insight because the standards or assessments were designed for one particular context, and may not be applicable to another. I am enjoying reading the essays and comments - please do not take my comments as critical, but rather honest questions and comments that are presented in a medium (the e-chat box) that can seem distant! Dr. Jess White

August 3, 2011

10:34pm

Posted by: JessWhite

Comment #9

The tension between the older who have done it before and the youth exists in communities beyond the Middle East. I do believe the apathy in youth before now may be the result of remnants of hope that perhaps the future does hold better promise.

However, a generation of leaders that came to power during the formative years of the older generation is dying and instead of change, youth see a younger version of the “old man” come to power. No change and no hope. Patience wears thin and the same hollow promises are being repeated. The youth revolt is coming at a time of debate for succession – Egypt, Yemen, and Tunis – and frustration at the lack of change in other nations that do have “inherited” young leadership.

As far as how youth contextualize themselves into conflicts, you are correct in that the response to the Nakba now is different than it was with the generation that witnessed it. But, as you correctly point out, there is a response and the youth are contextualizing themselves and responding quite differently from the “witness” generation. But, they are responding.

August 3, 2011

11:57pm

Posted by: jhamara

Comment #7

Another major reason for the youth increasing revolt against the older generation seems to stem from the rapid increase in socio-economic disparity between the majority poorer segment of the population and the small rich minority, especially in post conflict and developing countries. This seems to be a major factor in motivating the youth to revolt against what they see and perceive as an unjust sharing of the world riches.

The youth all over the world and especially from third world countries are now instantaneously exposed, through the new media, to the ostentatious consumption that is displayed 24 hours a day 7/7 over these media.

August 3, 2011

10:34pm

Posted by: brakaba

Comment #8

In response to brakaba, you make a good point. The youth have unprecedented access to the knowledge that the gap is widening at a blistering pace and they are able to see and identify with stories that sound much like their own, but from different communities (whereas in the past, this inter-community communication and

identification may have been limited). They also have unprecedented means to comment on the disparity, their own situation, and the reactions of other global players, like the World Bank.

Jess White

August 3, 2011

10:42pm

Posted by: **JessWhite**

Comment #10

This is also a generation that is technology native and responds and acts in innovative ways with technology..

August 4, 2011

12:00am

Posted by: **jhamara**

Comment #11

Thank you for the opportunity to read and comment on your work, Ms. Amara. My question is, to what extent do you think high growth rates, such as those enjoyed in the last decade in emerging markets and many sub-Saharan African states, might mitigate the likelihood of youth-bulge-induced conflicts to spread outside the Middle East? And what role, if any, do you see the price of food playing in the mobilization of youth?

I agree with your contention that a perceived lack of respect for their dignity as human persons has been a strong motivator for the current youth in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia during the current upheaval.

August 4, 2011

2:08am

Posted by: **NMayr88**

Comment #15

The high growth rates that many emerging countries and especially those in sub Saharan Africa witnessed were tied primarily to the price of commodities. The price is tied to demand in the developed world. With the world wide economic slowdown, the demand for commodities is not as high.

I don't see the high growth rates continuing especially since the underlying economic issues in the emerging countries have not been addressed. I still perceive these nations as vulnerable to a youth revolt.

August 5, 2011

11:17am

Posted by: jhamara

Comment #12

Thank you, Professor Amara, for your very thought provoking essay. You speak of "a compelling and credible agenda for change between leaders, national governments, and civil society that includes youth. . ."

What specific elements would you include in that agenda and why would you include them?

Mary Beth Reissen

August 4, 2011

1:12pm

Posted by: Mary Beth Reissen

Comment #16

Some of the items that I would like to see discussed high on the agenda are cronyism, privileges accorded to the "elite", and corruption. All three are very pervasive and detrimental to progress. These elements serve to maintain the status quo and stifle progressive. Most importantly, they encourage apathy in youth because they send a message of non inclusion leaving the majority of citizens with no stake in the outcome of society.

It leads to the notion that people who are not a member of the privileged class do not have a stake in the benefits of a prosperous nation. At best, citizens do not participate in the progress of a nation and at worst they sabotage it since no benefits accrues to them. Think of participating by paying taxes. If the services provided by the government and those in power are nonexistent, why pay taxes? Why keep the streets clean? Why deal honestly, when honesty obviously does not pay?

To say nothing of the effect on economic growth. For example, projects are tendered not based on merit. The end result is poor work that is over budget and long past delivery. If the projects is a large infrastructure project, like a power plant, costing hundreds of millions, funded by borrowed money, we end up with a poor nation increasingly in debt to other nations to pay for a project where money was squandered and stolen.

August 5, 2011

11:38am

Posted by: jhamara

Comment #13

The Sierra Leone chapter of the B-Gifted was founded on the initiative of Andrew Benson Greene. Since its launch in 2007 B-Gifted Foundation of Sierra Leone has used creativity and technology to address human rights, enhance peace and development. Andrew's earlier efforts with International Education and Resource Networks Programs also become a catalyst for bringing education to the young people of the country, using information communication technology and psychosocial rehabilitation to help restore health and hope to children whose lives have been devastated by war, in particular child soldiers.

Mr. Greene, Founder and CEO at B-Gifted Foundation in Sierra Leone and a Suave Scholar, McGill University Canada, sent this Peace and Unity article entitled "Elements of Terrorism Can be Groomed At Early Age", and the following are some excerpts and quotes from his article:

"The recruitment of child soldiers around the world can be a breeding ground for terrorism. Whilst children are in themselves terrorized by violence, they continue to be dangerous to the lives of others when conscripted as child soldiers, and forced to even turn their guns against their very parents, families and friends upon whose survival their welfare once depended."

"I remembered that my country was locked in the quizzical position of beauty, wealth, brutality and poverty, which existed side by side in a decade of war that has now completely ended. The sustained peaceful pace and democracy in Sierra Leone today has ushered in a new glimmer of hope to stop the drafting of children into soldiers. It is my wish that this will be a shining example in other dozens of countries around the globe today."

"I came to North America, as a research scholar at McGill's Scholars Program, and realized that these issues and problems affecting children used in armed conflict have not been granted the full attention it deserves in this part of the world. I knew that Canada's strategic place in the world, its history and record of human rights and peace can be a powerful pedestal for me to launch my campaigns to calm the rough tides of warfare in which children were adrift... In my inquiry, I had the chance to speak with a group of sensitized students who believed that they can join in my efforts to help make a better place for the children of the world."

Having seen children change dramatically for the worse and the problems of small arms readily available falling into their hands, Mr. Greene is resolved to help transform "tragedy into positive elements on which children's lives can be made whole again".

For children and youth who survived wars and hostilities as child soldiers, a long-term process of re-instating them into society remain a mammoth task, says Andrew Greene. Alternatives to involving children in armed conflict must be found to help them resume life in the community, by teaching them to be responsible, and discover their talents and inherent strength. “This re-integration and rehabilitation process will mean the provision of not only relief and food, but also education and training on all fronts, psycho-social support, and appropriate strategies for economic livelihood”.

This has been Mr. Green’s major pre-occupation for the last six years, using the power of educational telecommunications technology tools: “Iand the incredible global learning network has inspired such trans-border and trans-cultural online interaction of youth from Sierra Leone and around the world.” It is Mr. Greene’s hope that this network of young people exchanging peaceful ideas (like creating “No War Zones”) and concerns for human rights “will usher in world peace in the near future”.

“I feel strongly that all of us can help to stop the use of child soldiers and that we must no longer be silent about it, as the elements of terrorism can be groomed at such an early age.”

Andrew Greene concludes his article with a quote from an interview with a McGill University student on this subject who stated that: “If we don’t fight to stop child soldiers, we are basically promising ourselves that there will be child soldiers in the future and that will be a poor future for all of us.”

Contact: Andrew Benson Greene, e-mail:
b.giftedfoundation@bgiftedfoundation.org or
b.giftedfoundation@gmail.com and abensongreene@gmail.com
 Website: www.bgiftedfoundation.org

August 4, 2011

1:52pm

Posted by: bgifted

Comment #17

Thanl you for sharing the article. I takes people of vision and commitment to make a difference.

August 5, 2011

11:40am

Posted by: jhamara

Comment #14

Interesting discussion and very helpful comments. A couple of questions for Jomana Amara (and any other takers): first, if you had to re-draft a document like the 2011 WDR what specifically would you add/subtract to address the issues you raise; second, what advice would you give practitioners/officials seeking to implement your proposals in regions affected by violent conflict?

August 4, 2011

3:11pm

Posted by: rgilpin

Comment #18

I do believe that the 2001 WDR is a very thoughtful document and I am quite encouraged that it tackled such a sensitive issue: the role of conflict and security in economic development. However, I would have expected the document to also discuss the effect of the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan resulting in the two largest ongoing conflicts. The document starts off stating that “.. 21st century violence does not fit the 20th-century mold. Interstate war and civil war are still threats in some regions, but they have declined over the last 25 years.” This is an interesting statement since we are only 11 years into the 21st century and we are witnessing two conflicts, Iraq and Afghanistan, that have lasted longer and certainly been more costly and devastating than most 20th century conflicts, and the Chechen and Georgian conflicts. We also witness the continuation of several 20th century conflicts with no end in sight, the Issue of Palestine and India/Pakistan.

I would encourage practitioners to consolidate efforts. I would like to see all donors integrate their projects. What we commonly see now is a piecemeal approach. A donor nation will provide aid and support without acknowledging the work of other donor nations. I would also encourage them to have a long sustained effort with the same personnel on the ground – really getting to understand the people and situation they are working with. Quite often the turnover is so fast in international aid organizations with personnel barely spending time before being transferred.

August 5, 2011

12:21pm

Posted by: jhamara

Comment #19

Please check out this evidence-based, free, open-source, resource site focused on youth and transition related issues. It is called the *Network for Youth in Transition*. The site contains over 1500 resources including some of the latest *funding* opportunities, toolkits, manuals, research papers, evaluations, blog posts, videos, and events

from around the world. The members comes from over 120 countries. You are welcome to explore and join the site at: <http://networkforyouthintransition.org/>

You are also encouraged to contribute your resources to this site. It is not affiliated w/ any one agency but the purpose is to act as a central repository for practitioners and youth interested in learning more about transition issues young people face.

August 6, 2011

8:45am

Posted by: SajiP

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Engaged Economists Writing About Conflict (20)

Foreign Aid (17)

Private Sector (16)

Economic Development (12)

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